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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Twenty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 46th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 26 November 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. BONOAN-DANDAN

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS:

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (agenda item 6) (continued)

Third periodic report of Mexico (HRI/CORE/1/Add.12/Rev.1; E/1994/104/Add.18; E/C.12/Q/MEX/1; written replies to the list of issues, and additional statistics in Spanish only, prepared by the Government of Mexico (documents without a reference number)) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the Mexican delegation resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON said that before inviting the Mexican delegation to deal with outstanding issues raised during the previous meeting, exceptionally, she would allow Members to put further questions.

3. Mr. RIEDEL asked when the Mexican Government was likely to indicate its precise position with regard to the adoption of an optional protocol to the Covenant.

4. Mr. PILLAY said that according to information provided by a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including the Mexican branch of HABITAT International Coalition, housing conditions in Mexico were appalling. The gravity of the problem had already been highlighted by the Committee in 1994, when considering Mexico's second periodic report; hence the recommendations in its concluding observations for urgent action to overcome the grave housing crisis, the adoption of policies to improve access to affordable housing, and the construction of more rental accommodation. According to the NGO sources, forced evictions represented a serious problem: between January 1997 and June 1999 some 39,500 families had been forcibly evicted. What were the reasons for such evictions and were they in compliance with the Committee's General Comment No. 7? He also asked whether it was true that in order to be eligible for government housing, it was necessary to earn twice the minimum wage? If so, some 40 per cent of the population were effectively denied access to such accommodation. What housing possibilities were there for the disadvantaged sectors of the population, such as the indigenous communities, the disabled and the elderly?

5. Mrs. JIMÉNEZ BUTRAGUEÑO asked to what extent the National Development Plan and the housing programme for 1995-2000 took account of the needs of disadvantaged groups in both rural and urban areas. Was any assistance provided to the elderly and the disabled with respect to housing? Were there special facilities for them on public transport?

6. With regard to indigenous people, what importance was attached to transmitting the experience and values of the elderly to the younger generation? Were there any associations to promote and protect the rights of elderly indigenous people? Lastly, how was the Government catering for the needs of the very poor, particularly in Mexico City?

7. Mr. MARCHÁN ROMERO said the delegation had referred on several occasions to the fact that around 60 per cent of the national budget was earmarked for social development, which in purely mathematical terms seemed to be a considerable amount. However, it would be useful to know exactly what was meant by the term "programmed expenditure" that had been mentioned. What proportion of "programmed expenditure" was allocated to social matters and to servicing external debt? What was the ratio of programmed versus unprogrammed expenditure in the budget?

8. Most of the Government's social programmes were run under the Education, Health and Food Aid Programme (PROGRESA), by far the largest government programme designed to meet the basic needs of the population. However, according to NGO sources, the funds allocated to PROGRESA actually represented only 0.15 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), which, all things considered, was hardly a very large amount. He would welcome further clarifications on those matters.

9. Furthermore it was his understanding that the health package under PROGRESA targeted at the very poor living in rural areas catered for only their basic health needs and did not cover hospital treatment. If that was the case, he would remind the delegation that in accordance with the criteria of the World Health Organization (WHO) it was the primary responsibility of the State to provide overall health care.

10. Mr. AHMED said that in his earlier statement he had drawn attention to the Committee's principal concerns regarding Mexico's second periodic report, including the difficult situation of many children both in the towns and in the countryside. According to the Committee's sources, in 1995 there had been 13,373 children living and working on the streets of Mexico City; according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) that number had now increased to 20,000. The situation in rural areas did not appear to be much better: almost 200,000 children aged between 14 and 16 worked in indigenous communities, 92 per cent of whom received no wages since they worked for friends or relatives and 52 per cent of whom left primary school so that they could contribute to the family income. Those figures were indeed alarming. He sought the delegation's reassurances that steps were being taken to alleviate the situation of such children. What programmes were under way? Had any benchmarks been established to gauge progress made in reducing the numbers of street children?

11. Mr. TEXIER, referring to article 8 of the Covenant, said that despite a Supreme Court ruling of May 1999 guaranteeing the right of trade unions to function freely and the right to join the trade union of one's choice, articles 68, 69 and 71 of the Federal State Workers Act were still in force, effectively making affiliation to a single trade union mandatory. In the light of the Supreme Court ruling, the Mexican Government ought surely to repeal that legislation; moreover, it might also consider withdrawing its reservation regarding article 8 of the Covenant, which no longer seemed necessary.

12. With regard to article 11 of the Covenant, he echoed Mr. Pillay's concerns regarding forced evictions and access to government housing for the poorer sectors of the population. With reference to article 12, he detected some regional imbalance in the availability of public hospital facilities. Had the Government devised any strategy to redress that imbalance?

13. Mr. GONZALEZ FELIX (Mexico) said the delegation would begin by dealing with those issues pending from the previous meeting, before replying to the further questions raised by Committee members.

14. Mr. URBINA FUENTES (Mexico) said that in recent years pollution had been one of the major challenges facing the Mexican authorities, particularly in metropolitan areas such as Mexico City. A number of factors, including its geographical location and high altitude, the high concentration of industry in the surrounding area and the presence of more than 3 million vehicles resulted in a 20 per cent reduction in oxygen in the atmosphere. Strategies to combat the problem included special monitoring programmes to gauge the effects of pollution in households and schools. Several hospitals were also on standby to alert the authorities to immediate health risks, information on which was made public through a metropolitan environmental committee.

15. The first phase of more extensive studies of groups of schoolchildren to assess the longer-term health effects of pollution had recently been completed and the results were being analysed in cooperation with competent bodies in Mexico and the United States of America. A national environmental health centre had been set up, whose environmental monitoring, research and preventive activities had resulted in a significant drop in the recognized pollution risk levels. Data had been compiled on daily pollution levels since 1988. In Mexico City there had been seven environmental emergencies to date. There had also been problems in other cities, such as Monterrey, although not on a scale which posed a serious threat to human health. The monitoring programmes and the introduction of measures including traffic restrictions had had a positive impact on environmental pollution in the last 10 years.

16. On the subject of AIDS, it bore noting that in 1986 a national AIDS register had been established, according to which there were currently around 150,000 HIV carriers in the country - not 270,000 as had been elsewhere reported. It was of course recognized that around 18 per cent of the persons affected by the HIV/AIDS virus failed to register. Mexico had a fairly low incidence of the virus (sixty-ninth in the world). Figures on incidence were made available to the general public through weekly and monthly publications and over the Internet. The virus was six times more prevalent among men than women and generally confined to the homosexual community.

17. As part of a national programme of prevention and care, campaigns had been launched to create greater awareness among high-risk groups of the consequences of the virus and workshops had been organized in cooperation with the National Human Rights Commission to defend the rights of persons affected and to promote the use of condoms. Qualified medical staff were available to care for such persons; more than 90 per cent of HIV/AIDS victims were treated as outpatients. In 1988 FONSIDA had been set up to provide free HIV tests, treatment and medication to persons under 18 years of age and pregnant women. In 1999 around 1,000 adults had also benefited from such services.

18. Combating poverty was indeed one of the Government's current priorities. In its introductory statement the delegation had stressed the importance of identifying adequate resources to achieve that end. The purpose of establishing four main programme areas was to target specific resources to cater for the needs of the 2.3 million extremely poor families in the

country. As to how it was possible to coordinate so many programmes, he noted that each programme not only had its own budget but also a specific committee responsible for monitoring its progress at State and federal levels, as well as coordination committees to evaluate results. PROGRESA was monitored by an interministerial committee with representatives from the four main ministries (Health, Education, Social Security and Finance). Coordination agreements were also signed with State authorities to ensure that programmes ran smoothly, particularly in the newly centralized health sector.

19. PROGRESA covered hospital care free of charge for the poor in addition to the basic health package. He was not currently in a position to provide a detailed breakdown of the budget, but such information could be forwarded to the Committee in due course.

20. Mr. RIEDEL said that according to UNAIDS and other international sources the HIV/AIDS virus was spreading via high-risk groups other than homosexuals. In many developing countries it was spreading increasingly through heterosexual relations; so prostitution, drug addiction and blood transfusion needed to be carefully monitored. Could the delegation provide properly disaggregated figures for high-risk groups in Mexico?

21. Mr. URBINA FUENTES (Mexico) said that although the highest incidence of the HIV/AIDS virus in Mexico was among homosexuals, it was also becoming increasingly prevalent among heterosexuals and the children of HIV-positive mothers. There was also a tendency for the virus to be concentrated in rural areas, probably owing to the numbers of migrant workers there. The number of cases identified seemed to be stabilizing and disaggregated data were compiled on such cases. A number of information booklets on the HIV/AIDS virus, targeted specifically at young people, were available for the Committee's perusal.

22. As far as nutrition was concerned, specific projects undertaken in connection with PROGRESA were having a significant impact on the group of children at greatest risk, namely, those between the ages of four months and two years as well as all undernourished children under the age of five, who were being provided with all the necessary micronutrients. The progress of the programme was being monitored by five expert bodies, and a nutrition experts committee had been established. As of 1998 statistics had been compiled on the nutritional status of children, in terms of height and weight per age and incidence of anaemia. He disagreed with the statement made in a 1994 UNICEF report that Mexico did not have a nutrition strategy, although he acknowledged that in 1994 efforts had been undertaken on a number of fronts. Those efforts had now been pooled to achieve better results.

23. Ms. PÉREZ DUARTE (Mexico), referring to the problem of street children, said that the authorities not only protected such children, but also endeavoured to determine the causes of the phenomenon. In that connection she referred the Committee to the written reply to number 31 of the list of issues, and to the detailed statistics contained in Mexico's recent report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC/C/65/Add.6).

24. She was aware that the dearth of statistics hindered programme implementation, but it was difficult to obtain reliable figures owing to street children's extreme mobility. The reason for the disparity between the government and NGO statistics was that the former emanated from

official reception centres and hostels, while the latter were based on data collected from a number of unofficial child-assistance stations; a child might be assisted at more than one station under different names and thus counted twice. She emphasized that the Mexican authorities did not neglect street children. The National Autonomous University of Mexico and private centres cooperated with the Government to adopt a targeted approach that would yield reliable statistics.

25. As to the reasons why children left home, the National Scheme for Comprehensive Family Development (DIF) had special programmes for child victims of sexual violence or trafficking and children involved in criminal activities such a drug peddling. Three such programmes had been described in the report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and dealt with street children, child victims of domestic violence, and indigenous and disabled children. The various Offices of the Government Procurators of the States of the Republic were taking measures to ensure that children did not become victims of crime and that they were not subjected to penal sanctions, given that minors were not criminally liable. Reforms were of fundamental importance in order to establish cooperation among parents, schools and childcare authorities. Following the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the legislation concerning child prostitution and trafficking in children had been reformed.

26. Ms. SALINAS (Mexico) said that the National Commission on Women was extremely concerned at the rising tide of HIV infection among housewives and female migrant workers. It was endeavouring to incorporate a gender perspective in the work of the Ministry of Health and to give women within the family greater responsibility for seeking protection against transmission of the virus. Discrimination against and abuse of women required legislative action, as well as a change in cultural attitudes. The Government was pressing ahead with legislative changes, despite the enormous political, human and financial investments that entailed.

27. The CHAIRPERSON said it went without saying that the Government was concerned at the growing incidence of HIV-infection among women. The Committee wished to know how the various programmes actually worked.

28. Ms. SALINAS (Mexico) said that the National Commission on Women furnished the Ministry of Health with information useful for its prevention programmes. A detailed report concerning the implementation of the National Programme for Women was available for Members' perusal.

29. The CHAIRPERSON thanked Ms. Salinas for drawing the Committee's attention to that report. Paragraph 396 of the third periodic report referred the Committee to annex XV for answers to questions concerning the causes and rates of maternal mortality and the proportion of such births attended by health personnel, but she had been unable to find the information in that annex. The human development index stated that illegal abortion ranked fifth among the causes of maternal mortality in Mexico. How many women had died in Mexico as a consequence of illegal abortions, and what was the Government doing to protect women from illegal abortionists?

30. Ms. SALINAS (Mexico) said that one of her colleagues would answer the Chairperson's questions on women's health. The rights of children aged 14-16 were protected by law. Raising

the minimum age at which children could work to 16 was a legal reform unlikely to be implemented for economic, social and cultural reasons, given that even some of the most powerful and progressive child-related NGOs were pressing for the minimum age to be reduced to 12.

31. On the subject of street children, the National Commission on Women, in close collaboration with UNICEF, was addressing one of the main reasons for children leaving home: namely, domestic violence. With NGO input, advice from academics and UNICEF support, and bearing in mind the best interests of the child, the National Programme against Domestic Violence (PRONAVI) had been launched on the basic principle that such violence constituted an abuse of rights and power, the main victims of which were women and children. She listed a number of official agencies involved in the programme, which identified cases, provided care for family members who were victims, and endeavoured to create a legal framework for defending women, children, the disabled and the elderly against violence. The programme had two aims: the amendment of laws throughout the national territory, and training of and dialogue with judges and other judicial officers and institutions. Five States and the Federal District had already amended their civil and penal codes and social welfare legislation, and discussions to that end were in progress in the remainder.

32. Mr. GRISSA, speaking on a point of order, said he was extremely dissatisfied with the oral replies being provided by the delegation. The Committee needed hard facts: for instance, was education compulsory? A list of laws contained in the statute book was unhelpful; what was important was the way those laws were applied.

33. Mr. TEXIER said he would like a reply to the specific question whether the authorities were considering raising the age of compulsory education from 14 to 16. On the subject of street children, the content of the laws was known; what he would like to hear was what measures the Government was taking to reduce their numbers.

34. Ms. PÉREZ DUARTE (Mexico) said that the delegation's task would be made easier if it were permitted to complete its presentation. A programme for helping children at risk had greatly extended its coverage, from 212 districts in 1997 to 604 in 1998, during which year 7.45 million pesos had been spent on taking children off the streets. The national DIF had a leisure camp programme for rescuing street children and returning them to their families or, failing that, giving them training opportunities to enable them to earn a decent living.

35. On issue number 28, marriage continued to be a State institution for which certain legislative requirements needed to be met. The minimum age had been set at 14 and 16 for girls and boys respectively, but some States had taken the positive step of raising the age to 18 for both sexes. Young people were being educated to avoid teenage pregnancies. At the time of presentation of the second periodic report, 2.5 per cent of the population had been teenage mothers; the figure had now risen to 2.9 per cent. Intensive government education campaigns existed to stop early pregnancies and dissuade parents from marrying off their daughters before the age of 16.

36. Unmarried couples living together benefited from legal protection. Once their cohabitation had been established, the only difference between them and married couples was

one of registration. For purposes of inheritance, work, health, housing and other services, both categories received the same treatment in virtually all States of the Republic. Children of both categories of couple were registered in the same way and the same maintenance laws applied.

37. Ms. SALINAS (Mexico) said that the training offered to judges and other judicial officers in the enforcement of new laws or the interpretation of amended legislation was a concrete measure for protecting the rights of women and children enshrined in the international human rights instruments.

38. Mr. CASTRO (Mexico), replying to questions on labour issues, said that the purpose of trade unions was to defend workers' interests vis-à-vis their employers. There were limitations on the right of workers exercising a responsibility on behalf of the employer to join a workers' trade union, since they could not be expected to have the interests of ordinary workers at heart. The legislation stipulated that the limitation was imposed on the basis of the functions involved and not of the post itself. The 1971 Federal Labour Act stated that such workers were free to form special trade unions, and no obstacles would be put in their way.

39. The Ministry of Labour, far from abdicating its role as the labour inspectorate with the establishment of the new supervisory agencies, had expanded it. The law specified that there must be no conflict of interest in the roles of the supervisory agencies. The Ministry, which had an explicit mandate to monitor those agencies, was free to check on their activities and could terminate them if irregularities were detected.

40. Regarding Mexico's reservation concerning article 8 of the Covenant, case law existed in the form of Supreme Court ruling 43/1999, to the effect that the provision that a State agency could have only one trade union was unconstitutional. However, in the Mexican legal system court rulings did not have effects erga omnes, but applied solely to the parties to the case; otherwise the judiciary would be exercising legislative powers. The ruling simply gave that particular agency the possibility of setting up other trade unions in future. Inasmuch as the derogation of a single provision could affect the Act as a whole, the entire Act would need to be reviewed. An interdepartmental commission was studying the matter, but until such time as the law had been amended the reservation would be maintained.

41. Under the new Social Security Act, government payments of health and family insurance, severance pay and old-age pensions were 10.6 times higher than under the old Act. Federal expenditure on social security was over 150 billion pesos for 1999, a sixfold increase over the previous year. Not only were pensions larger, but they had the advantage of being index-linked, thus maintaining pensioners' purchasing power. More money had also been made available for child welfare and a new system had been established, under the heading "Health in the workplace", whereby the amount contributed by the enterprise would be calculated on the basis of its accident record. Another advantage of the new system was that the entire family would have access to the health services provided.

42. One fundamental merit of the new system was its simplicity and transparency. Each worker had an individual account to which he or she could make additional voluntary contributions with a view to ultimately receiving a higher pension. The acquired rights of contributors to the previous scheme were fully protected under the new system.

43. In response to the questions regarding minors, he could only say that, for the time being, there was no plan to raise the minimum working age. ILO Convention No. 182, 1999, provided that programmes of action to eliminate the worst forms of child labour should be designed and implemented in consultation with the relevant government institutions and employers' and workers' organizations. After holding such consultations, it had been agreed that the minimum age should remain at 14 because, although child labour should be protected, it currently still constituted a valuable addition to the family income, a fact that needed to be borne in mind.

44. Mr. TIRADO ZAVALA (Mexico) said that the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare had succeeded in obtaining reliable data on children in the formal labour market through its inspection service. In the first part of 1998 alone, 8,413 inspections had been conducted, as compared to 8,482 for the whole of 1995. The inspection mechanism was used to detect irregularities in working conditions in general and with regard to gender equity and the rights of women and child workers in particular.

45. The Government was currently engaged in an interdepartmental study of all the problems of child labour, with a view to establishing the most accurate figures possible given the complexity of the issue. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare had taken careful note of the results of the study carried out by the national DIF system with the support of UNICEF. As a result of the study, covering adolescents working in Mexico's 100 largest population centres, the Ministry had been able to establish five categories of child worker. Begging and the provision of personal services accounted for 20 per cent of the whole. Twenty-four per cent were engaged in the production and sale of small articles and 18 per cent in activities in the traditional sectors. Only 24 per cent were contractual workers in the formal sector. Of the total number of child workers under the age of 17 surveyed, nearly one quarter worked in the street. Another quarter were employed as stock clerks and packers in supermarkets, where their activities were closely monitored by the company as well as by the government service. Fundamental requirements for access to that form of work were that the children should be attending school, and that they had permission from their parents to work. Such work was valuable in giving adolescents an opportunity to earn money out of which they could pay for their own education, since even in the State schools additional costs had to be met.

46. A number of government units were working together under the leadership of the President to design a programme to eliminate the exploitation of child labour. He could only give a broad outline of the plan produced after a number of joint working sessions, but he wished to make it clear that, when the time came, the plan would be officially published and available for comment. One difficulty was that only a part of child labour was covered by the federal labour laws governing relations between employers and contractual employees. Outside the formal sector, there was no hierarchical relation of that kind. In the formal sector, work by children under 18 was subject to special conditions, concerning rest periods, for example, and the number of hours worked. One aim of the proposed plan was to ensure that, in activities where there was no formal contract, children were not employed in circumstances that hampered their education and development.

47. As far as the actual exploitation of child labour was concerned, the aim was to eliminate it entirely. That would demand the participation of other units of the Government as well as the provision of funds for training inspectors. The study was ongoing and had been the subject of

much internal discussion; more work would be needed to give it final shape. He noted that, because of Mexico's federal structure, labour inspection as determined by law was carried out at two levels, Federal and State. Thus coordination between the Federal Government and the State Governments was very important.

48. On the problem of street children and the sexual exploitation of children, he noted that not only had Mexico completed a study of the problem but it had already engaged in the consultative processes whereby ILO Convention 182 could be brought before the Senate, where he had no doubt it would be adopted. In addition, the newly revised criminal code imposed severe penalties for offences under the Convention, such as pornography and child prostitution, which fell outside the labour laws.

49. While illegal child labour in the formal sector was being combated through enhanced inspection measures and fewer and fewer irregularities were occurring, in the informal sector it was very difficult to detect violations. Questions had been asked about the precise incidence of child labour. He regretted that he could not produce specific figures, but noted that any actual complaint was investigated and punishable by law.

50. A number of questions had been asked about the minimum wage. The concept of a minimum wage sufficient to meet the normal material, social and cultural needs of a head of family was enshrined in the Constitution. Unfortunately, given the negative rate of economic growth in recent years, it had proved impossible to put the idea into effect. The burdens that had had to be imposed as a result of the 1995 economic crisis had been felt by all Mexican citizens. The economy had recovered considerably since that time, but many jobs had been lost in the process. In principle, wages were set by the National Wage Commission, which consisted of representatives of workers and employers, with the Government actively encouraging a dialogue between them.

51. Mr. GRISSA said that, given the size of the Mexican economy and its 50 million-strong labour force, some 9,000 inspections annually by the labour inspectorate were a drop in the ocean. There also seemed to be a very wide gap between legislative provisions and what actually took place. For example, the Constitution provided that basic education should be compulsory. Yet the report said that the Government hoped to make it possible for 80 per cent of children of school age to complete primary education by the year 2000. Discrepancies of that kind were unacceptable.

52. Mr. TEXIER said he wondered whether the provisions of the Covenant were taken seriously by the Government of Mexico. Given the responses of the delegation, he feared they were not.

53. Mr. TIRADO ZAVALA (Mexico) said that the labour inspections to which he had referred had specifically concerned the conditions in which children were working. Special inspections were also carried out in regard to conditions for women's work. It was regrettable that he did not as yet have all the relevant statistics at his disposal, but he had now requested them. The delegation was attempting to report on the steps taken by the Government and to describe the actual situation. It acknowledged that not all the provisions of the Covenant had been fulfilled but, in the current circumstances, the Government could only do its best to come as

close as possible to fulfilling them. Mexico's economy was improving but it took time for improvements in the macroeconomic situation to trickle down to the ordinary consumer. Now that the structural adjustment process had been completed it was Mexico's intent to progressively achieve the goals to which it had committed itself in signing and ratifying the Covenant.

54. Questions had been asked about the informal sector and about unemployment. Two important programmes had been set up in that connection. The first was the Integrated Quality and Modernization Programme (CIMO) aimed at protecting and expanding employment by offering small and medium-sized enterprises help in improving quality control and productivity. The other was the National Programme of Training Grants for Unemployed Workers (PROBECAT). Its aim was not simply to subsidize the unemployed but to give them the tools they needed to re-enter the world of work. The training provided was linked to supply and demand in the labour market, and included opportunities for subsidized temporary employment. An important feature of the PROBECAT Programme was the promotion of job fairs. The number of such fairs had risen from 11 in 1995 to 131 in 1999. The PROBECAT Programme also had a training component directly linked to schools.

55. Turning to the issue of privatization, he said that the State railways corporation had been privatized in the belief that such a move would solve a large number of problems relating to unprofitable enterprises. It was, however, still necessary to protect workers' rights. Such protection had been achieved through early retirement, compensation and rehiring programmes. The national oil company, PEMEX, had, contrary to common belief, not yet been privatized.

56. Ms. PÉREZ DUARTE (Mexico) said that confusion had resulted from the distinction made between moving people out of their houses and forced evictions. The natural disasters that had occurred had forced the authorities to relocate those who had lost their homes - a far cry from the concept of forced eviction. Following the legislative reform in that area, allegations had been made that tenants had been deprived of protection against losing their houses. In the Federal District in the past month only 16 cases had been recorded of people being moved out of their homes. Thus, the figures did not appear to have worsened as a result of the new legislation.

57. Mr. RIEDEL said that the issue of eviction was a complex problem, addressed in the Committee's General Comment No. 7. Citing paragraph 22 of the General Comment, concerning the need for appropriate data to be made available, he asked what specific measures had been taken to prevent inter-urban migrants who were occupying land illegally from being evicted. According to reports by a number of NGOs, 40,000 families had been affected by such measures.

58. Mr. GONZÁLEZ FELIX (Mexico) said that the figure of 40,000 cited appeared to relate to the number of victims who had lost their homes as the result of the natural disasters that had occurred. On the subject of lawful evictions, he said that the subject was not currently under discussion and that information could thus not be provided immediately. However, a request for information would be made to the Mexican courts.

59. Ms. GARZA HURTADO (Mexico) said that the National Fund for Workers' Housing was a service that currently catered for around 11 million people. In 1999 it had granted loans to 170,000 lower-income workers, most of whom earned at most three times the minimum wage.

Other housing bodies existed for workers in State enterprises, the armed forces and self-employed people. The Ministry for Social Development had specific housing assistance programmes for lower-income families and the victims of natural disasters.

60. Ms. TORRES SALAS (Mexico) said that since the beginning of the 1990s the education system had undergone a far-reaching transformation, with the legal framework amended, basic education programmes revised, teacher-training provided and up-to-date-materials introduced. The focus was on social integration and personal development; education was seen as a lifelong process; and the strategies adopted singled out poor and isolated areas. Article 30 of the Constitution had been amended so as to recognize the State's obligation to provide basic education at secondary level, the benefits of pre-school education and the importance of children completing their primary school studies. The main challenges facing the education system were to ensure that all children completed primary schooling, and to increase the numbers completing secondary education. In the 1998/99 school year 90 per cent of pupils embarking on primary education had already completed one year of pre-school education, while 93 per cent of those between the ages of 6 and 14 attended school. Ninety per cent of 15-year-olds completed their primary education and 63 per cent of 18-year-olds completed their secondary school studies. Those figures should be seen against the background of an illiteracy rate which, 80 years previously, had been as high as 70 per cent.

61. Mr. CEAUSU asked for more details concerning the education provided for children from indigenous groups. It appeared that there were a total of 5.5 million indigenous-language-speakers, 3.5 million Spanish-speaking indigenous people, and 1 million indigenous children studying in schools. What percentage of the total number of primary-school-age children did they constitute?

62. He noted that according to the documentation submitted Mexico's policy did not seek to integrate indigenous people into society, but to respect their practices and traditions. However, at the same time it was stated that the National Institute for Indigenous People (INI) was responsible for promoting the integration of the indigenous communities at national level, with full respect for and dissemination of their culture. Since the 1970s, the term "integration" had been strongly rejected by indigenous organizations and government departments. Apparently it was not synonymous with assimilation but implied that full citizenship might be granted while preserving linguistic and cultural identities and bringing those concerned to a level of civilization equivalent to that of the majority of the population. Given that education was considered to be an instrument for integration, precise figures should be provided in relation to education for children from minority indigenous groups.

63. Mr. ZOLLA LUQUE (Mexico) said that throughout Mexico's history integration had been synonymous with a policy of homogenization of cultures. All that had now changed: article 4 of the 1992 Constitution proclaimed Mexico to be a pluricultural nation and emphasized diversity and integration, in the sense of a harmonious form of association.

64. Problems arose with regard to indigenous education as a result of the very large number of indigenous languages - a total of 62 according to the 1990 census. Bilingual education required programmes and materials in all those languages. The numbers of people in each indigenous group also differed greatly: there were 1.5 million in the Nahua group and only

50,000 in the Otomi and Mixteco groups. Other even smaller groups had languages that had not even been systematized. Consequently, the biggest problem facing the Directorate-General of Indigenous Education was whether to provide real bilingual education or simply to place emphasis on Spanish. Educational materials were currently published in 53 different languages at primary school level. The problems affected 1.15 million pupils, or one fifth of all speakers of indigenous languages.

65. Responding to the question raised by Mrs. Jiménez Butragueño, he said that elderly people played a fundamental role in indigenous society, where they worked as doctors and as agricultural and climatic experts. The Government provided support for over 70 organizations of indigenous doctors, of which the largest was in Chiapas. The transmission of indigenous values was also underpinned by other programmes. The INI had set up 24 radio stations broadcasting in 31 indigenous languages as well as in Spanish. Indigenous cultural funds yielded over one thousand projects every year designed to benefit the communities concerned.

66. Mr. GONZÁLEZ FELIX (Mexico) said that in the first 10 months of 1999, 1,685,447 illegal immigrants had crossed the border between Mexico and the United States of America. In addition, just over 5 million persons had entered the latter country legally. A bilateral consultative mechanism had been set up to consider the issues of border crossings and illegal immigrants and the protection of those concerned.

67. On the subject of elderly people, he said that the over-60s enjoyed a number of privileges and concessions within a system of overall protection. Disabled people, too, were accorded particular attention. The National Senate was currently studying the possibility of ratifying International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 159: Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons), 1983. The interdepartmental commission for human rights was also studying the possibility of Mexico acceding to the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities. Fund-raising events were frequently held for disabled people. Relevant information on the subject of child morbidity was to be found in the National Programme of Action for Children (1995-2000).

68. Concluding his comments, he stressed that the provisions of the Covenant were targets which Mexico aimed to achieve in its progressive realization of the rights of all its citizens.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.